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FM USMISSION USUN NEW YORK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2574  
INFO RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBZ/AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE PRIORITY  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 USUN NEW YORK 000744

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DEPT FOR AF, IO, AND PRM; USAID FOR DCHA; NSC FOR PMARCHAM;  
GENEVA FOR NKYLOH; ROME FOR HSPANOS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [UNSC](#) [CG](#) [XA](#)

SUBJECT: UNSC: U/SYG HOLMES ON HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN DR  
CONGO

USUN NEW Y 00000744 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (U) Summary. On September 11, UN Under Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes briefed the Security Council in a closed session on the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Based on his recent field visit to DRC, Holmes outlined continuing humanitarian needs, particularly in the eastern region, while also noting some progress towards recovery following elections and an end to fighting in most areas of the country. Holmes expressed particular concern over widespread sexual violence, calling on the international community to continue to treat the victims of such atrocities while working more effectively to prevent them. Holmes reported that the Cluster Approach provides an effective coordination framework for the UN's humanitarian efforts, but he emphasized that the DRC Action Plan remains significantly under-funded.

¶2. (U) Summary continued. Holmes urged stronger political dialogue, both within DRC and with its neighbors, to address the root causes of the long-term conflict and to prevent its spreading to neighboring countries. Security Council members echoed support for Holmes' message, supporting continued humanitarian assistance, the continuation of MONUC's role in protecting civilians, and more robust political efforts to develop a comprehensive solution to the crisis. Following the consultations and with the agreement of all members, France, as Security Council President, released a press statement expressing the Council's deep concern and calling for all parties to initiate a dialogue to end the conflict. End summary.

¶3. (U) Holmes' assessment of the humanitarian situation in DRC following his recent mission depicted some improvement, including the overall reduction of internally displaced persons (IDPs) over the last four years from 3.4 million to 1.2 million, the establishment of some democratic institutions, and general stability in many parts of the country. However, he expressed grave concern over continuing humanitarian needs, characterized by severe malnutrition and high levels of displacement in some areas following recent violence, as well as widespread chronic disease and the virtual absence of infrastructure in much of the country.

¶4. (U) Holmes noted that North and South Kivu account together for close to one million IDPs, which is ninety per

cent of the total national caseload (with two-thirds of that number in North Kivu, including 300,000 since November 2006).

Holmes reported redoubled efforts by UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross in Mugunga, North Kivu, including emergency mass registration of IDPs for the distribution of food and shelter material, but he warned that current capacities are overstretched. Holmes also noted worrying trends that displaced populations appear to be self-segregated along ethnic lines and that the current conflict has the potential to spill into neighboring countries.

15. (U) Among a range of ongoing humanitarian concerns, Holmes stressed sexual violence as a particularly disturbing feature of the DRC conflict. He cited 15,000 victims of sexual violence treated in Panzi Hospital near Bukavu since it opened in 1999, and he speculated that many more women go untreated due to the ostracism associated with such attacks. He called on the international community to continue to treat victims of sexual violence as well as to find better ways to prevent it. Holmes called on the DRC government to put into place a "justice system worthy of the name" to address the current culture of impunity, including the immediate implementation of laws on sexual violence that were recently passed by the National Assembly. Holmes identified MONUC's commitment to the protection of civilians, including the "judicious use of its presence as a deterrent," as invaluable. In response to a number of questions from members on what more could be done, Holmes admitted that there is "no magic solution," but that there is urgent need to continue treatment for victims as well as to enhance training of government troops (although he also acknowledged that many violations are committed by irregular military forces).

16. (U) Turning to the political situation, Holmes noted that the complex political and ethnic roots of the conflict must

USUN NEW Y 00000744 002.2 OF 002

be tackled through dialogue and negotiation. He called for "strong, urgent and concerted political and diplomatic action" by the DRC government, governments in the region, and the international community. Holmes speculated that the current ceasefire's danger of collapsing is "extremely high" if not accompanied by political dialogue, adding that there might be a role for outside mediation. He commended recent efforts by the DRC government to engage in dialogue with Rwanda and Uganda. Asked about any recommendations to DPKO following his visit, Holmes responded that he will suggest that MONUC force levels not be reduced in the near term and that MONUC continue to pursue its protection of civilians mandate. Regarding concerns about ethnic polarization, Holmes called on the DRC government to make clear that they recognize a political role for the Tutsi community in eastern DRC.

17. (U) Member states expressed unanimous concern about the humanitarian situation in DRC, including the potential spill-over of the conflict to neighboring countries. Many thanked Holmes for his attempts to galvanize international attention and support. Stressing that there can be no military solution to the conflict in eastern DRC, many members echoed Holmes' call for expanded political dialogue, both internally and within the region. Belgium noted that natural resources and their management are an important element in the conflict and therefore need to be addressed.

18. (U) The U.S. intervention expressed concern about the recent fighting in eastern DRC and its humanitarian impact on civilian populations. Ambassador Sanders also noted concern over the World Food Program's (WFP) pipeline, which is under increased strain due to the additional needs from recent displacement. Holmes responded that he is carefully watching the WFP pipeline and announced that the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) in DRC recently allocated an additional \$3 million to WFP. More resources could be allocated from the CHF or the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) if needed,

according to Holmes. In response to a U.S. question, Holmes also stated that the Cluster Approach, which is being pilot tested in DRC, has provided an effective coordination framework at national and local levels. Holmes added that humanitarian coordination in DRC is "not perfect," particularly in the health sector, but that the Cluster Approach has proved beneficial in strengthening leadership and addressing gaps in coverage.

19. (U) With the agreement of all Security Council members, France, as Security Council President, released a press statement expressing the Council's concern about recent fighting in North Kivu and urging all parties to comply with international humanitarian law. The statement called for the Congolese authorities to address impunity, particularly with regard to sexual violence and abuse against women and children. In addition, it demanded that illegal armed groups lay down their arms and urged the Congolese authorities to redouble efforts to seek a comprehensive political solution to the conflict.

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